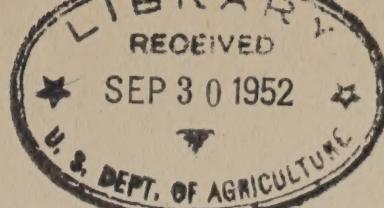


Extension Service
U. S. Dept. Agr.
Wash. 25, D. C.



BUYING WOMEN'S STREET DRESSES (MAN-MADE FIBERS AND COTTON)^{1/}

I. Assumption:

Extension clothing specialists can afford to spend the time for taking leadership in providing help to homemakers on buying street dresses, because:

1. Women often complain that dresses do not hold their appearance or that they fail in some way in cleaning or washing; or that the buttons, belt, or trimmings do not hold up. But they do not seem to be able to profit from a sad experience by becoming better buyers next time. Wide advertising of new fibers and blends has stimulated many questions from homemakers to home demonstration agents.
2. Studies of Family Clothing Supplies by the Bureau of Human Nutrition and Home Economics showed that rayon or silk dresses were a comparatively high item among the average yearly clothing expenditures for wives.

| Minneapolis | Meeker and ^{2/} |
|-------------|--------------------------|
| - St. Paul | Wright Counties |
| (Minnesota) | (Minneapolis) |
| 1948-49 | 1949-50 |

For wives, rayon silk dresses -- \$17.00 \$10.00

Source: Preliminary Report No. 1. Family Clothing Inventories by Income. Minneapolis-St. Paul, 1949; Preliminary Report No. 2. Family Clothing Purchases by Income. Minneapolis-St. Paul, 1948-1949; and unpublished data by the BHNHE, U. S. D. A.

Other items that ranked high were fur coats, wool suits, nylon hose, and shoes for street, dress, work, or sport. Among the items that ranked high in average yearly expenditures, rayon silk dresses, nylon hose, and shoes were the ones owned by more than 90 percent of the wives. The results of these studies, then, would confirm the choice of street dresses as a good item to use for mass media and for "planting seeds" in interesting all women in buymanship programs.

^{1/} Prepared by Alice Linn, Extension Clothing Specialist, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington 25, D. C. May 1, 1952.

^{2/} Farm-operator families. If the expenditures by Meeker-Wright families were adjusted for the price changes in the year between the studies, the figure would be slightly higher.

II. Objectives:

1. To give homemakers in medium-income brackets information that will help them buy medium-priced (\$ to \$) dresses which will hold their appearance for a reasonable length of time (yrs. to yrs.).

III. Background: What does the specialist need to know?

Manufacturers and distributors of clothing with a more or less national market may be very much interested in national figures showing income, spending, and price trends. The county home demonstration agent and the local retailer are more interested in the income brackets of families living in their county or trading area and the market and employment conditions there. The specialist is in between and has an interest in knowing national and State facts so she can better help the agent evaluate local trends.

1. Distribution of family income. In the United States nearly one-third of the families have incomes of less than \$2,000. Of course a farm family with a money income of \$2,000 would have more available cash than a family with the same income in a city. Who are those families with less than \$2,000 in a given community? Are they mostly families with young children, or are they retired couples? To which ones would buying clothes be a money problem? To which families is clothing important socially? Is there a difference in the desires of a low-income family living in a community where the whole community has about the same income and those where the community ranges from high to low? Is it the money they spend in dollars that is important to them? Or is it the feeling of being as well dressed as their neighbors?

More than a third of the families in the United States are in the \$2,000 to \$4,000 income group. Are they the "good customers" in a small town community? Are they the ones that influence the kind of dresses a merchant stocks? What is the difference in the way they spend for clothes and the way a family of the same income living in an urbanized area spends for clothes?

Less than a third of the families living in the United States have incomes of more than \$4,000. They have the most dollar votes in the clothing market. What is the difference in the way a woman from this group buys a street dress and the way that one from the \$1,000 group buys it? Which one asks about care? Which one can afford to have a dress shrink now and then? Or, on the other hand, do women with little money accept the fact that they must buy the cheapest, save it for good, and not ever have it cleaned?

Can we reach families in various income brackets by the same methods? Which ones are the "joiners"? Which ones come to extension and express their wants? Which ones are best reached through mass media? Homemakers with more means sometimes find it easier to give time for volunteer leadership. Are they acceptable as leaders to homemakers with less money to spend? Is there a difference in the freedom with which homemakers talk in a group about spending money, because of the differences in the amounts they have available to spend? Is there a better way to teach buymanship than through the group discussion approach? Or, does the success of the group approach depend on the way it is handled? Did many of the homemakers interviewed talk freely about price? How many retailers listed price as a primary interest of the women?

Percentage distribution of families by 1949 income

| Income | United States | North | North | South | West |
|------------------------|---------------|-------|---------|-------|------|
| | | East | Central | | |
| Under \$1,000 ----- | 15 | 11 | 12 | 24 | 11 |
| \$1,000 - 1,999 ----- | 16 | 11 | 13 | 21 | 13 |
| \$2,000 - 2,999 ----- | 18 | 19 | 19 | 18 | 17 |
| \$3,000 - 3,999 ----- | 20 | 22 | 22 | 15 | 22 |
| \$4,000 - 4,999 ----- | 12 | 14 | 13 | 9 | 14 |
| \$5,000 - 5,999 ----- | 8 | 9 | 9 | 5 | 9 |
| \$6,000 and over ----- | 12 | 14 | 12 | 8 | 14 |

Source: Bureau of the Census (U. S. Dept. of Commerce, Washington 25, D. C. (1950 Census of Population, Preliminary Report, Series PC-7, No. 2.)

2. Trends in incomes and spending.

As a group, consumers spend more for clothing as they have more to spend. Clothing expenditures are always a big item in personal expenditures. Disposable income more than doubled from 1941 to 1950, as did expenditures for clothing. Prices went up but not as much as disposable income.

In considering this income figure it is well to remember that population increased from 131,129,000 in 1940 to 150,697,000 in 1950, and that the two age groups where the greatest increase occurred were the under 5 and over 75. Though not all families benefit equally from rising incomes, a general knowledge of trends in incomes and prices can help an agent in evaluating comments about prices which often come up in meetings. National figures would probably be more comparable to urbanized areas than to other areas.

The price trends show that clothing prices increased slightly more than the general trend, but that rayon dress prices increased less than 50 percent from 1941 to 1950. Have women shown less interest in making their own rayon dresses than in making garments that went up more in price?

Personal income and expenditures

| | 1950 | 1949 | 1941 | 1935 |
|---|-------|-------|------|------|
| Disposable personal income(billions of dollars) | 204.3 | 186.4 | 92.0 | 58.0 |
| Personal consumption expenditures " " " | 193.6 | 180.2 | 82.3 | 56.2 |
| Clothing, accessories, and jewelry" " " | 22.9 | 22.9 | 10.5 | 7.0 |
| Clothing, accessories, and jewelry (percentage of disposable income) ----- | 11% | 12% | 11% | 12% |
| Clothing, accessories, and jewelry (percentage of consumption expenditures) ----- | 12% | 13% | 13% | 12% |

Source: A supplement to the Survey of Current Business, National Income, 1951 edition.

Consumers' price index (1935-39=100) for moderate-income families in large cities

| Items | 1950 | 1949 | 1941 | 1935 |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| All items ----- | 171.9 | 171.9 | 105.2 | 98.1 |
| Food ----- | 204.5 | 210.2 | 105.5 | 100.4 |
| Apparel ----- | 187.7 | 198.0 | 106.3 | 96.8 |
| Rent ----- | 131.0 | 121.2 | 106.4 | 94.2 |
| Fuel, electricity, refrigeration ----- | 140.6 | 133.9 | 102.2 | 100.7 |
| House furnishings ----- | 190.2 | 195.8 | 107.3 | 94.8 |
| Miscellaneous ----- | 156.5 | 149.9 | 104.0 | 98.1 |

Source: Monthly Labor Review.

Index of Retail Prices of Selected Articles Purchased by Moderate Income Families in Large Cities of the United States (1935-39=100).

| | 1950 | 1949 | 1941 | 1935 |
|-----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|------|
| Women's rayon dresses ----- | 147.1 | 162.6 | 103.6 | 98.8 |

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, U. S. Department of Labor.

3. Expenditures for rayon silk dresses.

What clues can we get from the studies of family clothing supplies? More than half of the women bought one or more rayon dresses during the year, and the average price paid was about \$14.98. As the income went up, more dresses were bought and higher prices were paid. At the income level of \$4,000 to \$6,000, rayon or silk dresses represented a slightly lower percentage of the woman's total clothing expenditures than at the income level of \$2,000 to \$3,000, however. Perhaps the \$12.50 dress reported by the \$2,000 to \$3,000 income group would be a good choice for a radio broadcast. How does this price check with the prices which the trade reports as best sellers? With the prices reported as best sellers in the county analyses? Are the fabrics reported popular in this price range good dry-cleaning risks? Good washing risks? Did any of them have good labels on care?

Expenditures for Rayon Silk Dresses for Wives

| Rayon silk dresses | All wives | \$2,000- 2,999 | \$3,000- 3,999 | \$4,000- 5,999 |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Average yearly expenditures ----- | \$16.56 | 13.78 | 17.31 | 21.66 |
| Average number purchased ----- | 1.11 | 1.10 | 1.19 | 1.32 |
| Percentage purchasing ----- | 58% | 59% | 58% | 68% |
| Average number owned ----- | 3.9 | 3.5 | 3.9 | 4.4 |
| Percentage owning ----- | 94% | 94% | 93% | 97% |
| Average unit price ----- | 14.91 | 12.56 | 14.54 | 16.36 |

Relation of amount spent for dresses to total clothing expenditures

| | All | \$2,000- 2,999 | \$3,000- 3,999 | \$4,000- 5,999 |
|---|-------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Average expenditure of family ----- | \$354 | 259 | 320 | 506 |
| Wife's average expenditures ----- | 182 | 137 | 156 | 266 |
| Wife's average expenditures for rayon silk dresses ----- | 17 | 14 | 17 | 22 |

Source: Preliminary Report No. 1. Family Clothing Inventories by Income. Minneapolis-St. Paul, 1949; Preliminary Report No. 2. Family Clothing Purchases by Income. Minneapolis-St. Paul, 1948-1949. BHNHE, U. S. D. A.

4. Women working outside the home.

A good deal is heard and read about women working outside the home. Is it a trend? If it continues, what effect will it have on home sewing? On women's shopping time? On the kind of dresses they want? Although community estimates are the important ones to the agent, a specialist wants to know the over-all trend and particularly the trend in her State in thinking of the future as well as in her use of mass media right away.

Employment of wives, husband present--

Are more wives employed?^{1/}

| Trend (by years) | Percent |
|------------------|---------|
| 1950 ----- | 24 |
| 1949 ----- | 23 |
| 1940 ----- | 15 |

What proportion of rural and urban wives are in the labor force?

^{1/} Included in the "employed" are persons working without pay for 15 hours or more during the week on a family farm or business.

| Residence (1950) | Percent |
|------------------|---------|
| Rural farm ----- | 17 |
| Rural nonfarm -- | 22 |
| Urban ----- | 26 |

Source: Rural Family Living Charts
October 1951, BHNHE, U. S. D. A.

5. In what price ranges of dresses are the best sellers found? What fabrics are most commonly found in the best sellers? In the lowest price ranges?
6. Are there differences in marketing dresses according to region, type of store, type of community, etc.?
7. What are the factors that affect price and style of women's dresses?
8. What are the problems of the manufacturer and the retailer in getting performance labels on dresses? Are we going to have to depend on labels? What kind of labels?
9. What are some of the common reasons for failure in cleaning, washing, and pressing?
10. Does the homemaker make good use of the information found on labels? Do the labels help her care for her dress properly?
11. How can a homemaker judge how a dress will stand up by what she can see?
12. What are the hidden values?

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